

UNDER A DARKENING SKY

could protest, with much show of reason on his side, that the Florentines had not the smallest right to object to the truce with the Visconti, seeing that they themselves had not contributed their share to the payment of the mercenaries, as they were bound by the terms of their treaty with the Church.¹ Nevertheless, the evil government and iniquitous policy of the papal representatives in Italy was calculated to arouse the worst apprehensions, and the Florentines could not look on with indifference while the neighbouring cities, hitherto practically free or ruled by friendly potentates, bound to their Republic by the Guelf league, were reduced to mere units in a powerful and consolidated State. The Pope wrote to the Signoria, complaining of their unworthy suspicions of him, protesting his great affection for the Florentines, and urging them to come to some agreement with the Cardinal to prevent Hawkwood's soldiers from harming their cities or those of the Church.² But it was now too late. On June 21, the Florentines made terms on their own account with Hawkwood and his *Societas Anglorum*, purchasing a five years' peace with them for the sum of 130,000 gold florins. A few days later, the anti-papal feeling in the city was roused to a height of frenzy by the discovery of a plot (which, apparently, was revealed by Hawkwood himself) to betray Prato to Cardinal de Noellet; two of the conspirators, a notary and a monk in priest's orders, were tortured to death through the streets of Florence with appalling cruelty. It was further alleged that an agent of the Cardinal had been in Florence, to spy out a site for the erection of a papal fortress.³ Hostilities were now inevitable. On July 24, the Florentines took the politically astute, but morally indefensible step, of entering into an alliance for five years with Bernabo Visconti. The next day, pleading the danger

¹ Brief of August 8, 1375. Raynaldus, vii. p. 268. Cf. Capponi, *Storia della Repubblica di Firenze*, I. pp. 319-322 ; Marchionne Stefani, Lib. IX. rubr. 751 ; Ammirato, I. 2. pp. 691, 692.

² Briefs of June 16 and 21. Gherardi, *La Guerra del Fiorentini con Papa Gregorio XI*, docs. 4 and 5.

³ *Diario del Monatti*, p. 507 ; Ammirato, I. 2. p. 693.